

## Mission

Richard Hugo House fosters writers, builds community and engages the Pacific Northwest in the world of writing.



**“I would have said yes to Hugo House if I had been asked to write about pig wings or chicken fodder.** I not only admire and respect the work that goes on at Hugo House, I love the idea of a community house dedicated to writers and readers. It is said some people are connectors, a living, breathing network, and Hugo House is that in the largest, most gracious sense.”

That’s what author Debra Magpie Earling had to say when we asked her what had been a motivating factor in her taking part in the Hugo Literary Series (you can read an excerpt of her piece, “Born of Place,” from the March 18, 2011, event later in this report).

Saying “yes” is something we try to do as often as possible here at Hugo House. It’s how we take on new partnerships. It’s how we launch new programs. It’s how we encourage everyone who comes through our doors to try something new—from dabbling in a new genre in a writing class to listening to new performers on our stages—saying “yes” to artistic risk benefits us all.

This report encapsulates some of the many ways we said “yes” in 2011—both in agreement (“yes, let’s absolutely put 1,200 Post-its in our gallery!”) and in excitement (“you got a book deal, yes!”). In doing so, we served more than 7,500 writers, audience members, zinesters, students, teachers, performers and others. (Yes!)

In addition to program-related improvements in 2011, administrative changes have made Hugo House more efficient, accessible and transparent. They included:

- A new online database that makes it easier for

people to register for Hugo classes and make membership donations

- An organizational development process to update job descriptions and ensure that staff resources support the mission effectively
- A new, more direct mission statement and new vision and values statements (see the final page of this report)

2011 marked our fifteenth anniversary. It was a great year of stabilization and growth for Hugo House and 2012 is shaping up to be even better. Thank you so much for being part of our journey.



Tree Swenson  
Executive Director

John Burgess  
Board President

## Board of Directors

**President** John Burgess | **Vice President** Connie Petersen | **Treasurer** Timothy Lovell | **Secretary** Brad Meacham  
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# CLASSES

Youth and adult writers of all levels build and practice their writing skills with professional writers and teaching artists in Hugo House’s creative, challenging classes. Every quarter, our catalog includes classes on a good mix of genres and topics; in 2011, based on patron feedback, we also instituted levels (beginner, intermediate, advanced) for our classes. We also provide scholarships to all who ask.



## Longest Class Title:

From “Much Ado About Nothing” to “It Happened One Night” and “You’ve Got Mail”: The Art of Writing the Romantic Comedy

## Most Popular Class Genre:

Long-form prose (novels and memoirs)

## Highest Number of Classes Taken by a Single Student:

7



3 Scribes sessions | 8 youth classes

17 Scribes scholarships awarded worth \$7,495

59 Scribes students | 65 youth students

70 youth and adult scholarships awarded worth \$8,253

109 teachers | 113 adult classes | 1,121 adult students

“ For me—like a lot of writers I know in the Seattle area—Hugo House is the hub of my professional life. I teach there often, but it’s also where I go to meet writer-friends, and it’s a place to attend the kind innovative readings that aren’t going to be found at traditional bookstores. The teens I’ve taught there, some of them come from troubled homes, and the House comes to seem like a community center for them, a place where they can connect with other like-minded people, other people who adore the written word. **There’s nothing else remotely like it in the city.**

I recently finished teaching an adult class at Hugo House, and I had a student who had been working on a book for a while, and was excited about it but also could tell something was wrong with it. We were talking about the somewhat abstract concept of narrative distance, when she practically leapt out of her seat as this bolt of recognition hit her: this was the problem with her book!

The protagonist was too distant from the narrative voice. She seemed so utterly relieved to finally know exactly what she needed to do to make her book better; and it was better, once she did a quick revision.

It’s been gratifying to keep up with some of my students over the years as they’ve continued to develop their work—some have gone on to MFA programs, two recently signed with literary agents and one recently sold her book (at auction!) to a major New York publisher.

—Peter Mountford, author of *“A Young Man’s Guide to Late Capitalism”* Mariner Books, 2011

”



“ Now that I’ve gone to a class and had the opportunity to sit with others who passionately feel and think about poetry as I do, and I learned from such a poet as David Wagoner, I think I landed where I was always supposed to land. I enjoyed the first meeting so much, I almost cried with happiness. — Devon, a scholarship recipient

”

# EVENTS

Hugo House events run the gamut from readings to book launches to writing happy hours to new work premieres to musical performances and beyond. Talented artists at all levels of their careers read and perform both established and new works on our cabaret and theater stages, or display art in our gallery space; we work to build community by combining diverse performers and genres—you'll always find something new to you on a Hugo House stage. And 86% of our events in 2011 were completely free to attend.

## Literary Series

The Literary Series is our flagship event: four times a year, we gather authors and musicians, provide them with a theme and a writing prompt and ask them to premiere their new, unvetted work in front of more than 200 people. In 2011, this commissioning process helped bring new pieces of writing into the world on the themes Brief Encounters, Born in the USA, The Haves and the Have Nots and While You Were Sleeping. New work was presented by Matthew Simmons, Debra Magpie Earling, Alan Chong Lau, Victor LaValle, Charles Johnson, Tara Hardy, Megan Kelso, Sherman Alexie, Nicole Hardy and Kevin Sampsell; and new music from Jason Dodson, Laura Love, Macklemore, Khingz, David Nixon and Rachel Flotard. More than 860 tickets were sold for our Literary Series events in 2011, which played to an average of 90% capacity crowds in our theater.

Below is an excerpt from Debra Magpie Earling's essay, "Born of Place," from the Born in the USA event.



Debra Magpie Earling

Photo by Greg White



Maria Semple



Victor LaValle

Photo by Greg White

Before my mother's childhood home was lost to a field fire in 2007, I would often stop beside Highway 200 and brave the snake-laced fields to visit the house that had been abandoned years ago. I would hitch through the windowless frame and enter my mother's old life. No human belonged there anymore. Earwig-tattered linoleum had bucked up in clumps. Mud nests of birds scabbed the rafters and swallows skittered at the ceiling then swooped down on me before they flitted out windows screened only by sky. When a faint breeze wrangled beneath the crawl space of the iron-blue weathered house the angry-sour smell of wolverine piss tinged the air.

My mother spoke of rattlers coiled on their porch, rattlers ticking beneath the thin floor slabs ticking whenever they walked. My great-grandmother Cecille, my mother and her three sisters would sleep together on the floor on a cattail mattress bound by flour sacks. Even in good times my mother's family faced poverty so dire the hissing wind snaked through the cracks of their home, and in the winter they would wake to snow powdering the army-issue horse blankets that covered their bed.

I possess a file of letters written by both my aunt Louise and my great-grandmother begging the Indian agent for a few dollars so Louise could have underwear for school and Cecille could feed the grandchildren left to her care. They lived on mice-infested flour and beans and were grateful for the rare container of boll-weeviled oatmeal. My mother spoke of a relentless hunger, long winters drinking bitter-black juniper tea to appease their growling stomachs.

# EVENTS continued

Of the **88** events produced or co-produced by Hugo House in 2011, **76** were free  
**1,200+** Post-its taking up residence in our gallery as part of Clare Johnson's Post-it Note Project

## National Poetry Month

In April, we presented 11 poetry-centric events, featuring visual art, music and food inspired by the words of our favorite bards; we produced and posted YouTube videos on our blog each day of local poets reading their favorite poems in public places all over Seattle, from the Aquarium to the elevators of the Convention Center; and we welcomed almost 600 poetry lovers to Hugo House and more than 20,000 to our website. Poetry, in all of its forms, will always have a home at Hugo House. As Shelley wrote, "poets are the unacknowledged legislators of the world"—and they have to hold court somewhere.

Weirdest writing prompt offered at Write Out, our happy hour for writers:

"An eagle scratches you with its poisoned talons. In five minutes you'll turn into an eagle and you won't be able to speak (English) anymore. You'd better write down anything you want to say before it's too late. (By the end of your writing you're speaking in Eagle.)" — David Nixon

Most misspelled word at the Local Celebrity Spelling Bee:

Coochieomancy (don't ask)

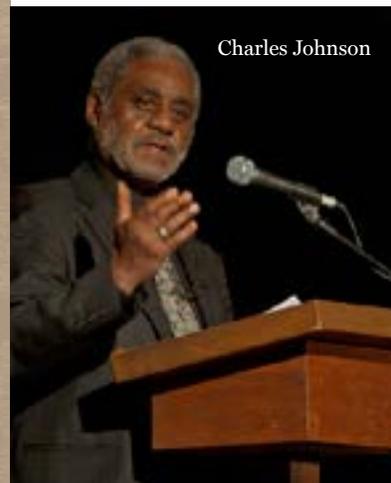
Best item a story was based around at Show & Tell, our ArtsCrush-sponsored event:

A stuffed bat formerly owned by actor Jeremy Piven (brought by Derek Erdman)



Photos by Greg White

Macklemore



Charles Johnson



Post-it Note Project

Photo by Christine Teixeira



While You Were Sleeping

## Writers-in-Residence

Since 1999, our writers-in-residence program has provided financial support to local writers in exchange for working on their own craft and mentoring other writers. 2011 saw Karen Finneyfrock and Ryan Boudinot wrap up their two-year stints as writers-in-residence in June; in September, we welcomed poet and memoirist Tara Hardy to the position.



Tara Hardy

“ Like Christmas, a family picnic, therapy, a warm bath, a night in the big city, an eTicket ride at Disneyland. More than I expected; a feast that made me hungry.  
*—from a visitor who consulted with writer-in-residence Tara Hardy* ”

In 2011:

The New York Times acknowledged Ryan Boudinot’s “fierce literary imagination” in its review of “Blueprints of the Afterlife,” which he worked on while in residence at Hugo House.



Karen Finneyfrock



Ryan Boudinot

More than 100 people met with our Writers-in-Residence for guidance and advice.

## ZAPP

Hugo House’s Zine Archive & Publishing Project (ZAPP) is one of the largest independent zine archives in the world, with more than 20,000 items in the non-circulating collection. ZAPP is open to the public three times a week and hosts classes, visual art shows, tours and field trips for non-profit and educational organizations.

“ The most personal thing to me in my adult life is ZAPP. I first came to Hugo House when I was eighteen and experienced firsthand the many skill-building opportunities that the organization offers to youth and young adults through its innovative programming in ZAPP. I found new ways to tap into my literary mindset and engage in the community, from welcoming new guests as an open hours volunteer in ZAPP to problem-solving on advisory committees with the staff, from being a volunteer engaged in learning to being a teacher. ZAPP is powerful resource for writers not just because it often features brilliant, conceptual and uncensored content but also because the program often involves the audience in creating the program itself.

— *Julia Lipscomb, volunteer and zinester* ”

In 2011, ZAPP had a number of impressive milestones:

4,361 total ZAPP volunteer hours

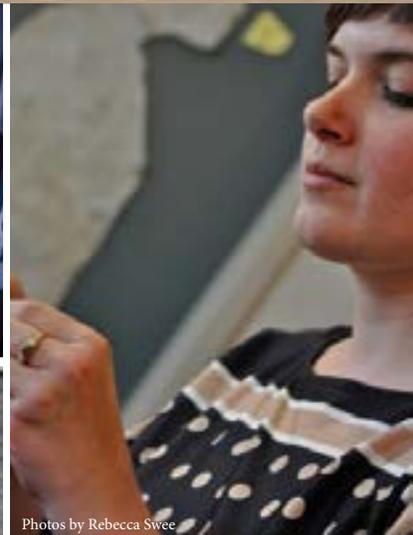
584 ZAPP open hours | 515 ZAPP visitors

900+ zines donated | 925 zines cataloged

24 ZAPP tours, workshops and presentations



Julia Lipscomb



Photos by Rebecca Sweet

# Online/Social Media

With the creation of a new social media internship position, Hugo House's online profile increased dramatically, allowing us to reach out to writers, readers and audiences in a new way. To further fulfill our mission we created the weekly communal writing prompt #FridayFiction on Twitter, which helps writers hone their prose through the brevity-enforcing limitations of the "tweet" and builds an engaged, dynamic community of writers and readers.

The community that has coalesced around the event each week is not only friendly, but #FridayFiction participants retweet our articles, our Words of the Day (another Twitter program) and our events. We also have devoted participants from Utah, Canada, California and other regions.

## In 2011, we:

- More than doubled our Twitter followers (now at more than 2,000)
- Increased our Facebook brand page "likes" by about 30% (now at more than 3,400)
- Built our YouTube presence, particularly with the "My Favorite Poem" program during National Poetry Month
- Created Google+ and Tumblr accounts



# YOUTH

## Write Time

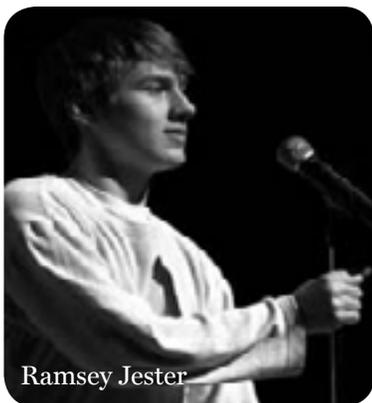
Our weekly drop-in writing circle for teens, Write Time, welcomed students to Hugo House every Wednesday during the school year. The young authors worked with poet and young adult novelist Karen Finneyfrock to create new work based on prompts, read and workshop one another's work, study inspiring pieces and perform their work at the monthly youth open mics, Stage Fright.

36 Write Time Meetings | 16 is the average age of Write Time attendees

64 young writers attended Write Time | 26 of those attended more than one Write Time

## Youth Writers-in-Residence

In 2011, we bid farewell to outgoing youth writers-in-residence Pete Oliver and Katie Carr, who both produced chapbooks of their work, helped lead writing groups at the YouthCare homeless shelter, did outreach for Hugo youth programming and emceed Stage Fright, our youth open mic. We were sad to see them go, but we were happy to bring on Ramsey Jester, Nathan Hale senior and impressive performance poet, as our 2011-2012 youth writer-in-residence.



### What I Am a poem by Ramsey Jester

There are poems that exist as whispers from the universe.  
Before long, my soul will be quiet enough to know them,  
but I am young,  
and I am meant  
to make noise.

# FINANCIALS

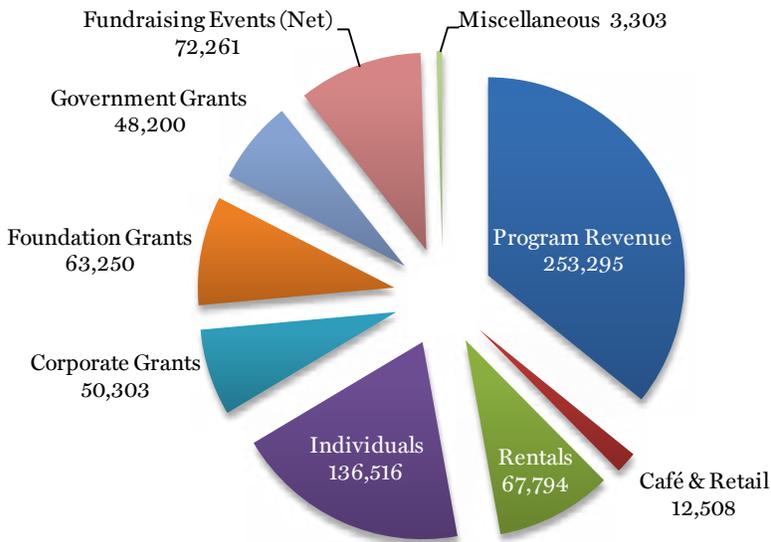
## Assets

Current assets:	\$240,697.38
Fixed assets:	\$986.42
Total assets:	<b>\$241,683.80</b>

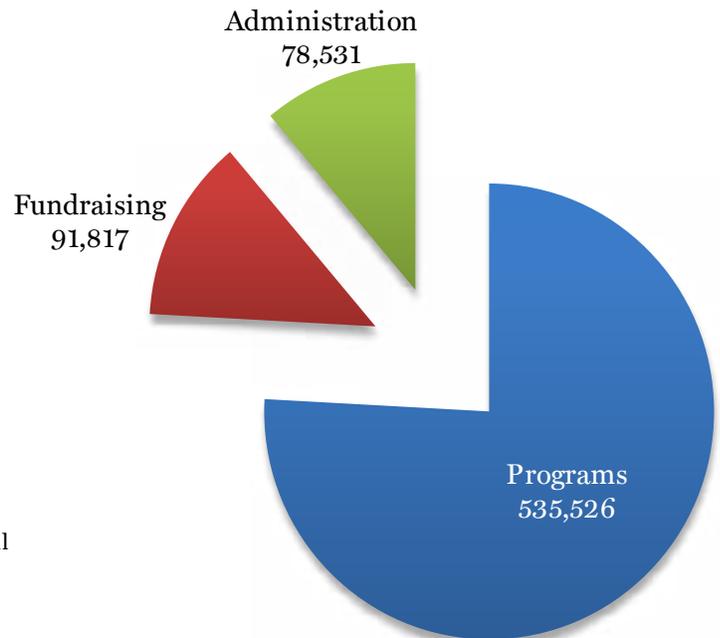
## Liabilities & Equity

Current liabilities:	\$59,218.76
Total equity:	\$182,465.04
Total liabilities & equity:	<b>\$241,683.80</b>

## Income Sources



## Expenses



## OUR MISSION

Richard Hugo House fosters writers, builds community and engages the Pacific Northwest in the world of writing.



## OUR VISION

Richard Hugo House is a nationally recognized community of writers and lovers of writing who use words to celebrate, understand and engage in the complex world around us and to give untold and heard stories a voice. We encourage and promote our shared love of language and writing as an important thread in the fabric of community that is crucial to political and social dialog, connecting people of all races, ages, classes and belief systems.

The Richard Hugo House community is supportive and collaborative, a place where writers of all kinds discover their authentic voices, take artistic risks without fear of judgment, build audiences for their work and launch their writing careers. Richard Hugo House is the place Pacific Northwest writers call “home.”



## OUR VALUES

Creating community | Artistic responsibility | Innovation  
Inclusiveness | Cultural enrichment | Sustainability